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A Position Statement on Social Justice, Physical Education and Bullying:

A Figurational Sociological Perspective

Mark Mierzwinski, Steven Cock, Philippa Velija

Abstract

Bullying is increasingly considered to be an important moral, political and social issue within modern society. Academic research on this issue has mostly been examined through a psychological lens, often using questionnaire data to examine and explain the prevalence of different types of bullying. In this position statement, we apply a figurational sociological perspective to examine issues of school-based bullying in physical education. We critically reflect on attempts to position bullying amongst young people as a ‘social justice’ issue and argue that core figurational principles might potentially help researchers strive towards a more reality-congruent means of conceptualizing the power-relationships that are inherent within bullying. We further maintain that the development of a more detached understanding of issues relating to bullying might provide a more adequate basis to contribute to future ongoing policy development.

Key Words: Bullying, physical education, social justice, figurational sociology

Introduction

Data from recent large-scale surveys suggests that between 45-51% of young people experience bullying during their time in UK schools (DitchTheLabel, 2018; Stonewall, 2017). Recent reports also highlight the impact that bullying in schools can have on the mental and physical health of young people and emphasize its lasting effects into adulthood (Brauser, 2014; Smith, 2014). Following instances in which children have committed suicide following their experiences as victims of bullying, bereaved parents have also lobbied the government

26 for the introduction of new anti-bullying legislation (Payne & Keenan, 2016). Such concerns
27 appear to be reflected in the recent increase of anti-bullying campaigns in schools (Anti-
28 Bullying Alliance, 2018). In response to concerns about bullying in the UK schools are
29 mandated to have an anti-bullying policy (GOV.UK, 2018).

30 Whilst the prevalence of bullying amongst young people has been increasingly
31 positioned by the government and others as an important moral and political issue (e.g.
32 Department for Education, 2017), there has also been increasing academic debate
33 surrounding the definitional and conceptual issues of what constitutes bullying. Such debates
34 are often based around the close affiliation of bullying to issues such as prejudice,
35 harassment, discrimination and victimization (Volk, Veenstra, & Espelage, 2017). Bullying
36 has also become increasingly difficult to differentiate from ‘banter’, a form of interaction that
37 is often intended to be more jocular, but can include impolite and offensive language and tone
38 (Nichols, 2018). Recent attempts to define the concept of bullying tend to focus on
39 understanding that such behaviours: (a) involve some elements of goal-orientated aggression;
40 (b) are negative, harmful or injurious to the victim; and (c) can be linked to power-
41 imbalances between those parties involved (Volk, Dane & Marini, 2014).

42 With increasing debate surrounding issues of bullying, some academic researchers
43 have sought to emphasize the ‘moral imperative’ for action to reduce instances of bullying in
44 schools (Rigby, Smith, & Pepler, 2004, p.1). At times, such issues have also been aligned
45 with a ‘social justice’ agenda (Polanin & Vera, 2013). Whilst social justice researchers have
46 made important contributions to academic discussions in recent years, there is however also
47 much debate surrounding the concept of social justice. The underpinning aims of much social
48 justice research are to examine issues surrounding fairness, discrimination and social injustice
49 within society. There is often an underlying ideological desire to change and improve the
50 social world and strive for greater equality and distribution of opportunities, benefits and

51 responsibilities for different people and groups through activism and praxis (Long, Fletcher,
52 & Watson, 2017; Riches et al., 2017; Wetherly, Watson, & Long, 2017). For some social
53 justice researchers, the world should be examined through a ‘politics of hope’ that ‘criticizes
54 the status quo and imagines how things *could* be different’ (Trussell, 2014, p.350, cited in
55 Riches et al., 2017, p.218; emphasis added by Riches et al.). The concept of social justice can
56 be heavily value-laden in striving to improve the situation for disadvantaged groups within
57 society. In the field of education, social justice agendas can broadly be seen as a call for
58 critical theorists and educators to engage and respond to the detrimental effects of
59 globalization on issues of equity and diversity within increasingly neo-liberal educational
60 practices (Azzarito et al., 2017).

61 The aim of this position statement is to offer a figurational sociological approach as a
62 means of understanding issues relating to bullying in school-based Physical Education (PE).
63 Malcolm and Mansfield (2013, pp.399-400) have summarized the key underpinning
64 principles of figurational sociology as follows:

65 (1) human societies can only be understood in terms of long-term processes of
66 change; (2) human life is characterised by interdependent relations which are
67 diverse and shifting and underpinned by ever-changing balances of power; (3)
68 human societies are characterized by different degrees of, and a dynamic
69 interplay between, internal and external social controls, with the increasing
70 internalisation of the latter in relatively complex societies; (4) human acts involve
71 processes in which intentional action contributes to unintended or unplanned
72 patterns of relationships; (5) social life is characterised by balances and blends of
73 emotional involvement in and detachment from the contexts in which human
74 beings find themselves.

75 In this position statement, we provide a figurationally-informed synthesis of key themes
76 relating to issues of bullying in PE and begin to offer a critical reflection on recent attempts
77 to label bullying amongst young people as a social justice issue. The more ideologically-
78 driven focus and occasional political involvements of some social justice researchers can, at
79 times, guide such research from the outset, leading such researchers to examine problems,
80 troubles and issues of the day from a more involved short-term perspective. Figurational
81 sociologists argue that examining social processes from a long-term developmental
82 perspective can aid in the development of more detached forms of knowledge (Dunning,
83 1992).

84

85 **PE, gender and bullying: A long-term perspective**

86 Figurational sociologists argue that a developmental approach in the research process can
87 facilitate a more adequate understanding of the long-term power-struggles that often underpin
88 social inequalities and unequal power-chances for different people and groups within society
89 (Elias, 1978). Elias (1978) argued, this can allow sociologists to consider how people's
90 actions are enabled or constrained through their interdependence with others. Historically, PE
91 has long been a gendered subject, particularly given that PE has (and often continues to be)
92 viewed synonymously with sport. At the time of the emergence of modern sport during the
93 18th and 19th centuries, gender relations between men and women were vastly unequal in
94 politics, education and public space. Sport was largely a male preserve, a social institution
95 honoured, demarcated and both organizationally and ideologically dominated by males.

96 Various modern forms of sport/PE started to emerge and develop in the male public
97 schools of the 18th and 19th centuries (Dunning & Sheard, 2005). Sport was an activity that
98 was seen to enhance Victorian ideals of masculinity. The development of masculine ideals
99 within public schools was linked, in part, to the widespread occurrence of bullying in early

100 forms of PE, often linked to greater power-chances for older and/or stronger boys (Dunning
101 & Sheard, 2005). The levels of physical violence that took place between pupils can appear
102 somewhat severe and, at times, brutal when examined from a more modern-day perspective.
103 However, these levels of violence were legitimized through the emerging prefect-fagging
104 system, which was implemented to maintain power imbalances, control and hierarchies both
105 between teachers and pupils and amongst the young males themselves (Dunning & Sheard,
106 2005). This experience was even considered by many teachers and parents at the time as an
107 important aspect of character development for instilling ‘manliness’ amongst male pupils
108 (Dunning & Sheard, 2005).

109 In the late nineteenth century, the emergence of public schools for middle-class and
110 upper-class girls involved physical activities that took place away from public view, behind
111 closed doors (Hargreaves, 1994). Whilst contributing to the tendency to omit female
112 participation from the history of early forms of modern sport, this provided an enabling
113 female-only space where more male-dominated sports and activities – including sports like
114 cricket – could be played (Velija, 2015). There was nonetheless still an expectation that
115 girls/women who were playing sport within public schools would adhere to strict behavioural
116 codes that emphasized notions of femininity, thus posing no direct challenge to the
117 dominance of male sport (McCrone 1998).

118 In the intervening period, there have been important changes in gender relations
119 during the course of the 20th century. In line with broader civilizing processes and ongoing
120 long-term power-struggles, the diminishing focus on manual labour work and women’s
121 growing access to social, political and educational spheres have contributed to gradual
122 processes of functional democratization (equalizing trends) between the sexes (Liston, 2018).
123 However, sport remains an area in which gendered power relations remain unequal;
124 something that also still remains evident in the design and delivery of PE in schools. In the

125 UK, young people are involved in physical activity through the formal PE curriculum as well
126 as extracurricular opportunities. Despite this, girls tend to be less physically active both in
127 and out of school settings (Green, 2010). The recent co-authored Youth Sport Trust and
128 Women in Sport survey (2017) reports that 71% of boys compared with 56% of girls enjoy
129 and are happy with the amount of physical activity in which they take part. This is despite the
130 introduction of the 1992 National Curriculum in England and Wales for all children in state
131 schools, which was intended to equalize the curriculum to meet the needs of all pupils.

132 The national curriculum is compulsory for all pupils and was partially designed to be
133 inclusive, yet to some extent, the gendered nature of the NCPE contributes to negative
134 experiences for girls and does not inspire lifelong participation. A critical perspective from
135 the outset expressed concern about: (1) the emphasis on games; (2) the optional nature of
136 dance; and (3) the place of outdoor education (Penney, 2002). The continued dominance of
137 games over other forms of physical activity has implications for gender equity for two
138 reasons, namely, that the content of games in PE have been most persistently associated with
139 sex differentiated provision and that the delivery of these activities has been most closely
140 associated with gendered patterns (Penney, 2002). Today, PE continues to be a subject area in
141 which dominant gender ideologies are socially constructed by teachers delivering the
142 curriculum and by pupils, who often begin their experiences of PE with notions of gender and
143 sport that, in many instances, are already fairly established (Williams & Bedward, 2002).

144 Another important development in schooling during the course of the 20th century, to
145 the present day, has seen long-term changes and/or increasing concerns regarding instances
146 of bullying. Such developments are indicative of long-term and complex interweaving
147 civilizing processes, in which people's sensitivities to instances of violence (as well as other
148 forms of behaviour that were considered to transgress expected social norms) have become
149 increasingly heightened (Elias, 2000). With gradual trends towards more civilized forms of

150 behaviour – in which greater levels of self-control were increasingly expected and required
151 from people in many areas of social life – being labelled ‘a bully’ has, over time, increasingly
152 tended to elicit feelings of shame and embarrassment. This is not to suggest that bullying in
153 and of itself has decreased, but people’s perceptions of (and attitudes towards) bullying has
154 changed over time. The gradual growing levels of repugnance towards physical aggression
155 offers one explanation for why there is now a greater variation in the types of bullying, which
156 now tends to be more verbal or indirect through forms of social exclusion and gossiping.
157 Along with the emergence of cyber-bullying, these forms of bullying are also more pervasive,
158 as they are harder to escape from, detect and regulate. Equally, a consequence of long-term
159 civilizing processes is that, within schools, young people are increasingly expected to respect
160 the feelings of others and exercise foresight into the consequences of their actions, or at least
161 refrain from verbal or physical conflict. However, young people are involved in increasing
162 complex networks of interdependencies which involve tension-balances and power-relations
163 which are always in flux. Part of their individual civilizing process (becoming more rational)
164 therefore involves learning to relate with others in a socially acceptable manner and
165 internalise a growing number of behavioural polices, such as school’s behaviour and anti-
166 bullying policies.

167

168 **Gender-based ‘bullying’ and ‘space’ in secondary PE**

169 In the UK, young people often only experience PE classes for up to two hours per week,
170 although this can be expanded if they engage in school sport and extra-curricular activities.
171 Whilst minimal, this time has been considered pivotal in young people’s understanding,
172 development and expression of gender (Connell, 2008). Most primary schools in England
173 include mixed-sex PE lessons, whilst PE in most secondary schools is single-sex with a
174 same-sex teacher. Noret et al.’s (2015) four-year study of 15,023 young people at primary

175 and secondary schools in England provided sex-variance data regarding the occurrence of
176 bullying in single-sex PE environments. They found that an equal proportion of secondary
177 school young males and young females reported being bullied because they are good at sport,
178 a finding that somewhat contradicts the more common assumption that being good at sport
179 offers males, in particular, kudos amongst their peers. However, they also found that more
180 young males reported being bullied because they are not good at sport, a finding that aligns
181 more with established notions relating to cultural ideas and stigma of gayness, effeminacy
182 and physical weakness.

183 Often synonymous with competitive sport, secondary school PE often values and
184 indeed celebrates traditional masculine ideals of strength, power, physicality and skill
185 (Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). Therefore, with few other spaces in school normalizing,
186 accepting and, at times, rewarding masculinized cultures, some young males experience a
187 gendered pleasurable excitement in male PE (Gerdin, 2017). However, young males’
188 attempts and necessity to embody this value-system inevitably creates a hierarchy premised
189 on ‘those who can’ and ‘those who can’t’. The visual nature of the power discrepancies
190 derived from this process can present opportunities for some young males to ridicule and
191 bully others (Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). For some dominant young males, the
192 pleasurable excitement that they experience in PE is informed by their dominance over
193 certain ‘weaker’ peers.

194 Whilst the severity of physical aggression may have diminished in schools in line
195 with long-term civilizing trends, the highly visible external body in PE means that feelings of
196 embarrassment and humiliation in relation to young people’s physical ability/competence has
197 arguably increased. These feelings and power imbalances between young males are often
198 highlighted and maintained through gendered peer-commentary e.g. ‘you bunch of girls’,
199 ‘you throw like a girl’. One increasingly popular means by which pupils engage in more

200 indirect verbal forms of bullying is through the guise of ‘banter’. Banter has become
201 synonymous with ‘lads’ and is often associated with sport settings. Banter seems to have
202 risen in popularity as a term to explain and excuse language which is on the margins of
203 acceptance (Nichols, 2018). Viewing banter from a long-term developmental perspective, the
204 term, and its use, could be understood in response to certain males’ resistance to the
205 perceived restriction on certain masculine habitus and concerns with the increasing
206 feminization of society.

207 Changing rooms have often been identified as a particularly prominent space for
208 bullying in school PE (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012). Irrespective of the rise of co-educational
209 PE, during secondary school, young people get changed in single-sex changing rooms. This
210 single-sex space has been described as a ‘hidden’ gendered curriculum whereby some young
211 males face ‘ritual (and indeed, systematic) bullying and humiliation’ (Atkinson & Kehler,
212 2012, p.166). Young males’ narratives of changing room cultures recall tormenting, verbal
213 abuse, physical confrontation and outright violence (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012). Of note here
214 is that these bullying relations take place in a space often devoid of adult presence, largely
215 due to teachers’ perceptions of youth privacy and fears of being accused of breaching child
216 safeguarding procedures (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012). Without a key authoritative figure,
217 certain young males have been able to exercise their power advantages over perceived
218 weaker peers in this confined space, at times making PE a ‘chilly’ and ‘toxic’ environment
219 for other male pupils (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012, p.166).

220 The issues that pupils experience within the changing room environment can be
221 explained in relation to broader long-term civilizing processes. Elias (2000) argued that, over
222 time, the naked body has gradually come to be associated with heightened levels of shame
223 and embarrassment, and thus, has become increasingly pushed behind the scenes of public
224 life. The process of changing from school uniform to PE kit therefore publicizes an otherwise

225 private experience. Young people's mandatory exposure of their semi-naked bodies to peers,
226 for whom they may or may not have established relations based on friendship and respect,
227 comes at a pivotal time during their development of body consciousness and gender identity.
228 This process is further impacted by modern sensibilities concerning adults' surveillance of
229 young peoples' semi-naked bodies, meaning that despite their professional status, teachers
230 minimize their entry to changing rooms. One unintended outcome of such modern
231 sensibilities is the provision of opportunities for undetected bullying.

232

233 **Power-relations in PE and everyday interpretations of 'bullying'**

234 Green (2003) has argued that there is a tendency to reify PE, that is, to conceptualize it as an
235 entity in and of itself. However, we must not forget that PE is inherently a social construct,
236 one that is co-constructed by teachers and young people (Green, 2003). One way to avoid
237 reifying PE is to consider PE as a figuration, 'a structure of mutually oriented and dependent
238 people' (Elias, 1978, p.261). Adopting this sensitizing research tool helps to place human
239 relations at the centre of any PE-related conceptualizations. In secondary PE in England,
240 mutuality is created through the mandatory nature of the subject, whereby young people are
241 usually categorized by gender and ability-sets. Therefore, young people's relationships with
242 peers may include 'new' relations with peers who are not usually in their other classes.

243 PE teachers are pivotal in the PE experience and young people often consider them as
244 role models for the promotion of caring peer-relations (Gano-Overway, 2013; Smith & St.
245 Pierre, 2009). However, media portrayals regularly depict PE teachers as drill
246 sergeants/bullies, whose harsh authoritarian pedagogies fail to create inclusive environments
247 (McCullick et al. 2003). There is some evidence that PE teachers can be complicit in
248 normalizing behaviours usually deemed as bullying in other facets of school, as well as
249 promoting and engaging in bullying relations between young people. For example, O'Connor

250 and Graber (2014) found that male and female PE teachers acculturated a bullying climate
251 by, amongst other things, promoting aggression and violence through implementing
252 inappropriate curricular selections. Some PE teachers even perpetuated peer-ridicule through
253 sarcastic comments or mocking demonstrations of poor skills (O'Connor & Graber, 2014).

254 At the centre of this teacher-pupil relationship was a discrepancy between banter and
255 verbal bullying, which illustrates, amongst other things, differing adult-child sensibilities to
256 commentary based on difference and levels of offense caused. The difference between adult
257 and child interpretations causes further tensions when PE teachers are tasked to adopt a
258 whole-school universal anti-bullying policy. Despite expressing desires to combat bullying,
259 previous research has shown that PE teachers held little knowledge of their school's anti-
260 bullying policies and adopted diverse strategies of dealing with bullying, which included
261 verbal put-downs and making light of the situation (O'Connor & Graber, 2014). The
262 normalization of jocular interactions in PE is further evidenced by young people reporting PE
263 teachers as present in 55% of peer-teasing incidents, but recalling that teachers ignored it,
264 brushed it off, or, on some occasions, laughed at crude peer-comments (Li & Rukavina,
265 2012). Other teacher interventions included telling victims to ignore comments or avoid
266 perpetrators (Li & Rukavina, 2012). Adding further weight to claims of a normalization of
267 verbal teasing/bullying in PE, researchers observed and young people reported that PE
268 teachers were more likely to intervene in incidents of physical bullying compared to verbal
269 bullying, resulting in many young people expressing how they felt that their teachers did not
270 care about bullying (Li & Rukavina, 2012).

271 A further concern with teacher-pupil relations was the perceived inequality within
272 these relations. PE teachers' use of banter involved certain young people within the class and
273 not others. Some young males bemoaned teacher-pupil bonding, which they perceived as
274 teacher favouritism (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012). These young males recounted how their male

275 PE teachers bonded with their perceived sporty peers through what they perceived as over-
276 praising and regularly joking with them, whilst 'non-sporty' males received negative
277 feedback and were mocked or neglected by male PE teachers (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012).
278 This level of favouritism was cited by some young males as a contributory factor for why
279 they or their peers failed to intervene and/or report instances of bullying as victims or
280 bystanders (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012).

281 The findings presented here illustrate a generational divide between teachers and
282 young people's interpretation of socially acceptable and inappropriate behaviours. PE
283 teachers have a significant power advantage in the PE figuration due to their status as adults
284 and professional teachers. Therefore, as described here, they play a significant role in the
285 normalization and everyday perceptions of bullying and banter in PE. Power-relations in PE
286 are not fixed or static, but should be considered as a series of shifting tension-balances. For
287 instance, the influence of PE over young people may differ depending on their level of
288 experience, teaching approach or the age of pupils in the PE class. Equally, whilst historically
289 PE teachers appeared to benefit from greater power chances through authoritarian teaching
290 pedagogies that created a clear power hierarchy between them and young people, accounts of
291 young people bullying teachers suggests that power-relations between the two can or are
292 shifting to a more negotiated position (Espinoza, 2015). This apparent shift in teacher-pupil
293 relations can be explained through broader shifts in power-relations between adults-children
294 that have taken place as consequences of long-term civilizing processes, a process that Elias
295 (1978) referred to as functional democratization.

296 As co-constructors of PE, young people and their relations need to be considered in
297 their own right. The literature on bullying in PE suggests that bullying almost always takes
298 place within a peer-group setting and is more likely to be verbal than physical. One example
299 of this is Symons et al. (2014) study of 536 young people, including 399 self-identified same-

300 sex attracted and gender diverse youth, who found that 20% of young people encountered
301 physical abuse in PE (shoved, pushed, etc.) compared to 32.3% who indicated that they were
302 verbally abused (name calling, threats, etc.) at least semi-regularly (sometimes, often or
303 frequently). Comparatively, Hurley and Mandigo (2010) found that 11.6% of young people
304 reported being physically bullied, whilst 13.6% experienced verbal bullying. The difference
305 in variance between these studies may be linked to differences in sample characteristics and
306 mixed-sex and single-sex class dynamic. Verbal and social bullying (exclusion and
307 gossiping) amongst young people was centred on perceived differences, primarily in
308 appearance and physical competency (Hurley & Mandigo, 2010). Specifically, young people
309 cited appearance-based differences as including body-size, personal attire, personal
310 characteristics (such as hairstyle) and perceived lack of attractiveness (Hurley & Mandigo,
311 2010). It was often young people lacking in physical competency, based on sporting skill and
312 athletic ability, that were bullied, but there were some instances reported whereby those
313 highly skilled were bullied (Hurley & Mandigo, 2010).

314 As demonstrated, due to de-routinized practices and more informalized relations and
315 behavioural norms, PE differs somewhat to other classroom-based subjects. These
316 behavioural norms inform those involved perceptions of banter and bullying within PE,
317 which can differ between and within the two social groups (teachers and pupils) and lead to
318 school anti-bullying policies not being implemented. The informality of PE/sport spaces
319 (whereby the use of banter may resist the more rigid forms of civilized restraint that are more
320 common in classrooms) means that young people are confronted with a need to be able to
321 'do', 'take' and 'not perceive' banter as verbal bullying. Therefore, the normalization of
322 physicality and verbal jousting in PE helps to explain relationally-informed subject-specific
323 interpretations of bullying in PE and discrepancies between those individuals involved. In

324 these more informalized settings, certain behaviours become normalized and exploitation of
325 socially constructed power differentials by some young people can go unpunished.

326

327 **Why adopt a figural approach to bullying in school sport and PE?**

328 This position statement has argued that PE is an environment whereby everyday
329 interpretations of ‘bullying’ are less heightened than those in other facets of schooling. In this
330 sense, we agree with Rivers’s (2010) call that school-based research needs to be more
331 subject-specific in order to gain a greater situational understanding of bullying. By focusing
332 on figural dynamics within broader figurations, a figural approach helps avoid
333 generalized conceptions of bullying in schools. It also helps emphasize the need to consider
334 the sub-cultural variances between and within different social groups, as well as key
335 contributory factors such as gender and sexuality and, although not discussed here, issues of
336 race, dis-ability and class. The following discussion expands on how a figural
337 perspective can be used to understand the issue of bullying in PE.

338 A long-term processual approach helps provide a more detached account of bullying,
339 which is necessary to better rationalize and understand how such conceptions and emotional
340 attachment towards bullying came to be as well as contextualizing long-term changing
341 perceptions of what constitutes ‘bullying’ in different eras and appreciating that such issues
342 remain dynamic. Whilst definitional notions of repetition and intent will remain subjective,
343 focusing on flux asymmetrical power imbalances helps to understand how and why bullying
344 in PE may take place. It is from this position that we are able to better consider means of
345 addressing significant power differentials that underpin bullying, and not get tied to or
346 embroiled in definitional clarity or issues.

347 A long-term processual understanding of human-relations also helps identify the
348 ‘sociological inheritance’ (Elias, 2000) that young people have to embody as part of their

349 individual civilizing process. This process refers to a period of socialization in which issues
350 of self and external restraint are shifting, whereby young people are increasingly expected to
351 refrain from emotional outburst (physically and, increasingly, verbally). Increasing levels of
352 behavioural and emotional refinements reflect changing power relations in which societies
353 with relatively tight-knit networks of interdependencies and relatively strong mutual
354 identification and mutually expected self-restraint is required (van Stolk & Wouters, 1987).
355 These relations are no less constraining than previously. If anything, they require greater
356 levels of mutual identification and self-restraint from young people, a process which
357 demonstrates the complexity of modern relations and self-restraint. For instance, we have
358 referred to how young people are challenged to identify and understand what banter is and
359 what verbal bullying is, whilst simultaneously having to interpret when peers (and teachers)
360 are adopting banter rather than verbal bullying. These complex emotions and relations with
361 others demonstrate the demands on young people to learn to restrain their thoughts and
362 behaviours in ever more complex socialization process. Helping young people to understand
363 their relations with others, as well as power imbalances and their ‘figurations’, may enable
364 them to better understand their emotions, and their emotional responses to others.

365 Given these increasing complex processes of socialization there has been an extension
366 of the notion of youth, epitomized through the introduction of mandatory schooling until
367 eighteen in the UK, whereby young people have longer to develop emotional self-control.
368 Linked to this, in discussing the hinge, Elias emphasizes how the physical body and self-
369 regulation are interwoven with learned mechanisms that emerge at different points in time
370 (Atkinson, 2012). The hinge is introduced by Elias to challenge the nature-nurture dualism
371 and convey a relationship which heightens our awareness that the two are fundamentally
372 linked and could not exist in separation (Velija & Malcolm, 2018). *The Civilizing Process*
373 can be viewed as a case study of the hinge, ‘illustrating how self-restraint is partially an

374 unlearned human drive, but forged in relation to changing, more interdependent, pacified,
375 centralized and functionally democratic environments' (Atkinson 2012, p.55). Considering
376 the relation between learned and unlearned behaviours may enable young people to
377 deconstruct gendered elements in PE and challenge these. This would require PE teachers to
378 be able to do this and thus challenge their views and occupational/gendered habitus in which
379 they consider gender to be biologically fixed and do not question these taken for granted
380 assumptions which continue to separate boys and girls in PE, drawing on established ideas
381 about the capabilities of male and female bodies.

382 A relational approach not only helps with historical to modern comparisons, as
383 mentioned above, but also helps us to consider how bullying is often: (a) manifested
384 differently within different educational settings; (b) relationally conceptualized along socially
385 constructed behaviours deemed 'acceptable'; and (c) determined through adult eyes and
386 heavily influenced by adult norms. Linked to this, a relational approach also helps
387 encapsulate the increasing speed of change in more modern societies within acceptable adult
388 and child behaviours, alongside broader changes in adult-child and gender relations, over the
389 last few decades, which can offer a more detached understanding of what a short-term
390 perspective may consider as fixed, static and inappropriate teacher conduct and teacher-pupil
391 relations.

392 The positioning of bullying in schools as a social justice issue is, in itself, not
393 surprising and can be broadly understood as a reflection on changing adult and child
394 relations, the emotive response to children in distress, increasing constraints on parents and
395 parenting styles, teaching styles, and broader changes in education, which prioritize research
396 agendas that have impact. However, the two are not as mutually exclusive as they may seem,
397 as a researcher can contribute to knowledge and understanding and be concerned with social
398 issues (or social justice). However, the method for doing so may differ. As Dunning (1999,

399 p.9; original emphasis) has noted, a ‘concern with relatively detached understanding has to be
400 tempered by a motivating and familiarity-conferring *involvement*’ which, amongst other
401 things, assists in understanding the experiences and views people express about their
402 situations and life worlds. We echo the work of Smith et al. (2018) here to say that whilst our
403 concerns might indeed be primarily academic, namely to develop a relatively detached
404 understanding of bullying, this is needed to develop a relatively detached understanding for
405 the development of more effective short-term and long-term policy formation and enactment.
406 Future research should concentrate on the workings of power within PE and figurational
407 dynamics and dominant social processes that enable the development and maintenance of
408 significant power imbalances between young people in PE.

409

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